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## Oregon's oracles of green

The state's reputation for sustainability helps green consulting firms take off

Portland Business Journal - by [Erik Siemers](#) Business Journal staff writer

Scott Lewis set out eight years ago to launch a little one-man operation that would help companies become more sustainable. At the time, most didn't even know what that meant.

"I never really set out to create a firm," Lewis said. "I had done a lot of consulting in policy work for 10 years, so I knew how to run a one-person business."

Within four years, Portland-based **Brightworks Northwest** LLC had 20 projects under management. Today, Lewis runs a company with offices in Portland, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Revenue has doubled every year to more than \$2 million last year, thanks to a client list that includes giants like Facebook and Cisco Systems Inc.

Brightworks is part of a growing cluster of sustainability consultants that dot Portland's landscape.

The exact number of firms is difficult to grasp, but it clearly reaches beyond a dozen, ranging from large companies such as Ecos Consulting to mid-sized firms like Brightworks and a wealth of one- and two-person operations.

"Portland is a hotbed of sustainability and as such it attracts people who are attracted to it," said Gary Langenwaller, managing partner of Sustainability Partners International, a five-person Portland-based consulting firm. "Because of that, there's no surprise there are a lot of companies on that path and a lot of consultants here."

Based on some estimates, climate change consulting is a big industry and one that's poised for rapid growth.

In a December report, the Climate Change Business Journal, a San Diego-based industry newsletter, estimated the climate change consulting market to be \$1.9 billion worldwide and \$670 million in the U.S. Those figures are expected to double in the next five years, even accounting for the global financial crisis, the publication reported.

Perhaps the biggest firm in Portland is Ecos Consulting Inc., both in revenue (close to \$20 million annually) and in the scale of its reputation.

Sustainability consultants most commonly develop niches. Ecos' bread-and-butter speciality is energy efficiency.

Among its biggest clients is Coca-Cola Corp., which is working with the company to help make its business partners — like regional fast-food chain Burgerville — save on natural resource consumption.

More recently it had representatives in Brazil helping the International Organization for Standardization develop new global energy management standards.

Ecos grew 60 percent last year and expects another 40 percent to 50 percent growth this year, said Dave Weigel, the company's vice president of marketing.

To keep up that rate of growth in a weakened economy, the message has changed.

"A year or two ago, we'd say 'sustainability, green-up your operations,'" Weigel said. "Now it's, 'improve your efficiency, get a payback in 36 months and oh, by the way, it fits into your sustainability plan.'"

Langenwaller jumped into the business five years ago having never heard the term sustainability. He had worked primarily the Northeast helping manufacturers become "lean," a practice meant to improve efficiency and create less waste.

Upon moving to Oregon, he discovered the sustainability concept, which adhered to many of the lean principles he had been espousing to manufacturers.

Today, he continues to help companies reduce waste and become more efficient, but within a different framework.

He admits that it's tougher to grab business this year.

"The difficult part in this economy is even getting 10 minutes to talk with an executive," Langenwaller said. "I know more than one company that's either laid people off or is real close to it. In a situation like that, they can't even talk to a consultant."



Cathy Cheney | Portland Business Journal

Scott Lewis launched Brightworks Northwest eight years ago. The consulting firm already has offices in four cities.

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Lewis' Brightworks has made the world of sustainable building practices its bread-and-butter. He's seen increased business from college campuses and is even working on a 6,000-acre project in Korea that will ultimately result in a new town.

Three projects his company has worked on have been granted the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards' Platinum certification, the highest ranking possible for energy efficient buildings.

It's a competitive marketplace, he said, but Portland seems to hold a strong place in the industry.

"In San Francisco, we have competitors down there for sure. I think you're seeing (growth) all across the East Coast and West Coast markets in varying speeds," Lewis said. "But Portland, for its size, I think is a little disproportionate."

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